

# ***CDS = Flexibility And Patience, Too***

Being a Children’s Disaster Services volunteer requires flexibility.

Gladys Remnant (*Bridgewater Church of the Brethren*) got the word at bed-time that the flight for her first deployment as a CDS volunteer would be leaving for California from Dulles International Airport at 9 a.m. the next day. That meant getting up at 3 to get to her brother’s home to leave her car and arrive at the airport by 7. She barely made the flight (yes, a traffic-stopping delay on Interstate 81).

Joyce Smart (*Valley Pike Church of the Brethren*) recalls arriving at a project site where the Red Cross representatives were clueless about Children’s Disaster Services. “What are you all going to do here? What are you doing here?” they asked. At the end of the first day, the Red Cross folks were expressing thanks and saying “they were very glad we were there.”

Frieda Driver (*Pleasant Valley Church of the Brethren*) has come to realize that sharing a sleeping tent with 100 other women was not as uncomfortable as she might have imagined. “I kind of enjoyed meeting people from different organizations and different parts of the country.”

So what do CDS volunteers do when they are called to the site of disaster? Recent deployments have taken them to Las Vegas after the mass shootings at a music concert, to California during wildfires and flooding, to Texas and Florida following hurricanes. Their task is to give children a safe and loving environment while their parents, overwhelmed with loss and grief, are coping with paperwork and interviews to get assistance. “Lots of parents are very, very appreciative, but some are understandably hesitant to let their kids out of sight,” Mrs. Remnant says.

Each team of volunteers is equipped with a Kit of Comfort containing items that invite the children to play. “We have toys that allow self-expression – paint, Play-Doh, dolls, medical kits, building blocks,” explains Mrs. Remnant. Using a flannel board with Disney characters, children sometimes re-enact the experience of being displaced from their homes.

CDS volunteers are trained in two-day workshops, undergo background checks and are issued official identification badges. They wear CDS aprons, smocks or shirts to clearly designate their role.

It all began in 1979 when the late R. Jan Thompson, then disaster response director for the Church of the Brethren, witnessed how difficult it was for parents to go through the assistance application process while tending children who were frightened, tired and bored. The first CDS deployment was in 1980, and since then, the Church of the Brethren website reports, over 3,100 volunteers have served more than 87,800 children at over 230 disaster sites.

The involvement of Jan Thompson and his wife, Roma Jo, drew Mrs. Remnant to the program. She



**CDS workers at Napa, Calif.  
Gladys Remnant of Bridgewater is at far left.**

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took the training in the early 1980s, found it beneficial for her teaching career, but never was available for deployment.

When she retired, and the Thompsons had moved to Bridgewater, she wanted to get the Bridgewater church involved in CDS as a tribute to them. She got re-certified at her home church in Manassas, then organized a CDS workshop in September 2017 at Bridgewater that trained 31 volunteers from several Shenandoah District congregations and as far away as New York.

Less than a month after that workshop, Mrs. Remnant got the call for her first deployment – to California to set up child care centers while wildfires raged in the Sonoma Valley.

“I really came to appreciate the organization that relief work requires, with multiple groups coming together,” she said. CDS is called to a project by either the American Red Cross or the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Her trip was organized and financed by Red Cross.



**Ready To Volunteer?**  
Training workshops are scheduled:

- March 23-24 in Shreveport, La.
- April 14-15 in La Verne, Calif.
- April 20-21 in Trotwood, Ohio

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“We dealt with smoke and wore masks most of the time. At one location where we worked, the fire was only a mile away...Some of the families had left their homes with only three minutes’ notice,” she said. Community support for the centers was amazing, with the donation of toys, clothes and supplies.

Ms. Smart’s only deployment so far was in February 2017 in response to flooding in Chico, Calif. After the Oroville Dam was breached, some 188,000 residents were ordered to evacuate. She served there for 10 days and remembers that “it was a real eye-opener.”

Some of the families had lost everything in the flood and then, adding to the apprehension, “it rained every day we were there,” she says.

“We were able to give the children a little comfort, and it makes you really appreciate what you have.” The experience was both “heart-warming and heart-wrenching...The children just cried when we left.”

Ms. Smart has worked in the health field as a long-time employee of Valley Health and as a certified nursing assistant (CNA).

Mrs. Driver has been on multiple deployments and most recently was in Beaumont, Texas, after Hurricane Harvey and then also in Sonoma, Calif., during the wildfires.

Some years ago, she responded to CDS from her experience as a mother and a registered nurse. Seeing television coverage of disasters and knowing the quality of her own children’s lives, she wondered: “How can I help?”

Her first deployment was to flood-damaged New Jersey. There, most of the families spoke Spanish, and she did not. “We made that work, too.”

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“I have never had a bad experience, and we care for kids from all backgrounds,” she adds.

About a year ago, Mrs. Driver took the next step in CDS work and was certified as a trainer, working at the Bridgewater workshop with trainers from Chicago and Portland, Ore.

Her next outreach effort will be in March when she and her husband, Millard, will make their annual trip to Haiti, where for 10-12 years they have been involved in digging wells and installing water pumps and solar panels.

All three of these CDS volunteers are prepared to accept another call.

“I’m packed and ready to ship out,” Ms. Smart said.

And about those Kits of Comfort (CoK). The Bridgewater church has updated one in honor of church member Esther Bittinger, who was a frequent CDS volunteer in years past. It is available for anyone heading out on a deployment.

Ms. Smart has one registered and ready to go.

At Pleasant Valley, Mrs. Driver is working with other CDS-credentialed volunteers to have a KoC completed and available for use.

Mrs. Remnant sums up the CDS experience: “Working with these kids is a joy, a true joy.” But, she adds, “Flexibility is absolutely paramount. And maybe patience, too.”

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